UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.

Mrs. Fanny Hojda
9931 64th Ave.
Rego Park, NY 11374-2652

Fanny Ungar Hojda

To my father who through his courage and intelligence and perseverance saved his family of certain death in the concentration camps. This is the story of my flight from Antwerp, Belgium. On May 10, 1940 Adolph Hitler started his blitzkrieg and overran and conquered France in six weeks. This tale tells how we managed to escape the Germans.

My parents were Jewish, born in Poland, married and went to live in Berlin until 1923, when they moved to Antwerp, Belgium with their three infant daughters. Two more daughters were later born in Antwerp. In 1940 I was nineteen years old. We were an upper middle-class family and lived in a beautiful house with a large garden. My father was a diamond dealer, as were many of our family and friends. We children went to French schools where we were taught French, Flemish, German and English. My parents ~~only~~ spoke Yiddish and Flemish, ~~French~~ German, and Polish

It was spring, our garden was in full bloom. I can still smell the lilac trees. On that day, May 10th, early in the morning, our world as we knew it was completely shattered. I woke up at dawn and thought we had a thunderstorm. My father came in and told us children the Germans are bombing the port of Antwerp and had invaded Belgium. My heart began to pounce. This is it. We had great fear of the Germans, knowing how they had treated the Jews in Germany and Poland. At that time there were no mass concentration camps yet. Fortunately, my father had taken home his diamonds the night before. He usually closed them in a vault for the night at the Diamond Club. He also dug up four gold bars which he had buried in the cellar.

He told us to take a very small valise and our gas masks. We locked the door and never saw our house or belongings again. We hired a taxi to take us to "La Panne," a seaside resort near France where the German army was stopped in the First World War. We rented a house thinking we will await the end of the war there. No sooner were we settled that we heard alarming rumors, that the Germans were advancing at full speed and would soon overrun us. We packed up our small belongings, bought a pushcart and walked towards the French border. We saw French and British soldiers going the opposite way. After several hours we abandoned the pushcart and most of our belongings, but kept the gas masks. I mention them because they were heavy. The French and British soldiers kept on pouring into Belgium. They had outmoded equipment. I hear my father saying "God help us, they are going to stop the German tanks with their First World War weapons." My father was a very smart man. My mother had trouble walking and my little sisters were very tired but my father kept urging us to continue walking as if our life depended on it, which it did. After many hours we crossed the border into France. This border closed soon after we crossed.

We arrived at Dunkirk where all hell had broken loose. There were huge warships and thousands of French and mostly British soldiers and the sky was full with German planes bombarding us. There were also hundreds of refugees like us sitting on the streets, on their suitcases. Each time bombs fell we ran into the underground shelter. We went to a cafe which was full of British soldiers who had come to fight the Germans. My father asked if we could board a boat to England. It was just across the channel. We were told that many boats never made it across. They were bombed and sunk by submarines. It was chaos. As we were taken by surprise, so were the Belgian, French and English. They were not prepared for war.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

https://archive.org/details/bib292100

At night we found shelter in the basement of a large stone building and the planes never stopped bombing. Every bomb that fell we thought it was going to land on the building and bury us. We were very frightened and spoke little. In the morning my father was arrested by two French policemen who accused him of being a German spy. They thought that the tfillin were a secret radio. My sister Shoshanna convinced them at the police station that a spy would not travel with five children and a wife and that the tfillim were religious objects. We felt we had to get out of this inferno as soon as possible, but there were no more trains leaving Dunkirk. We had a map of France and saw that the nearest city was Boulogne. We had to get away as far as possible from the advancing Germans. Maybe we would get a train in Boulogne which would take us to Paris. Fortunately, after a long search we hired a car that brought us to Boulogne.

At Boulogne we rented two rooms in a hotel. Boulogne was an eerie sight. The sky was full of huge balloons held up by wires so the German planes could not fly very low. We slept, and the next morning we went to the train station. There were already hundreds of people waiting for the train to Paris. Rumors flew that there was going to be a train. There was not going to be a train. After six hours of waiting in one place, sitting on the floor in the waiting room so as not to lose our turn, we boarded the train for Paris. The train was packed. We had seats but people were sitting on our feet. We rode for about one hour, very slowly, and then the train stopped and German planes started bombing the train. Some cars were hit and many people were killed. My mother tried to protect my little sisters by covering them with her body. I remember thinking that I did not want to die. I was only nineteen and had not started living yet. Next to me sat a Frenchman who told me the best protection was under the train. I took two sisters and went under the train. My father was

beside himself when he did not see us. He pulled us out from under and told us to throw away our belongings except for the gas masks and start walking away from the train as fast as we could.

We walked right into a French army unit whom the Germans were bombarding. They flew so low that we could see their faces. We saw a hut and took shelter, but the soldiers started yelling to get out, we were a target. They said we should lie down and be very still. We were putting them in danger and we all could be killed. From far we saw parachutes coming down and we did not know if they were German or French. It was very scary. I landed in a prickly bush. I got a rash and burns all over my arms and legs. I picked up a large piece of shrapnel not knowing what it was and the soldiers were again yelling. When the bombing let up we continued walking.

We were very hungry and spotted a farm with a farmer where we asked to buy some food. She said the only food she had was milk from the cow that she just milked. We drank very hungrily. We could not linger. My father said we have to continue walking away from the Germans. After awhile we got very sick from the fresh unpasteurized milk. We kept walking and walking. There was nobody around us, just the fields and the seven of us; father, mother and five girls ages nine to nineteen.

Night fell and we entered a huge forest. My little sister was walking and sleeping. My mother's legs were swollen but we walked all night, never resting. All of a sudden we heard a loud noise of horses and men. A French regiment of soldiers on horses appeared suddenly from the side road going towards our path. They were galloping at full speed as though they were being chased. We jumped in a trench on the side of the road and watched terrified, holding on to each other, praying that the horses should not stray from the straight

path. They could not see us. it was still dark. It seemed to me that it took forever until they passed. It was a miracle that we were not trampled by them. Until this day I am afraid of horses.

We continued walking. In the morning we entered a village where hundreds of people were gathered. They said that the Germans would enter momentarily. The streets were filled with army trucks and French soldiers. My father offered the soldiers some gold coins to take us along with them. They said we are going to the battlefield not far from here. We asked which direction, and went the opposite way.

In the meantime my shoes had a hole in the sole and my feet were bleeding. We saw a peasant with two donkeys and my father gave him some money and my mother and I sat on the donkeys for awhile. We then found a man with a truck and we asked him to take us to Rouen, the nearest city. We thought we would be able to get on a train south, away from the battlefield. At 1:00 A.M. we arrived in a strange city. The driver of the car had let us off in the red light district. We were very tired and sleepy. The streets were deserted. We saw a small hotel and couples lining up to pay, soldiers, sailors and their girls. We just wanted to lie down. I asked for two rooms for seven people. The clerk looked at us in surprise and asked me for how many hours. They only rented rooms by the hour. My father and I understood in what place we had arrived but were too embarrassed to let on that we knew. I counted on my fingers, and told the clerk seven hours and paid up. We got two rooms. My father told my mother to put her coat on the bed, nobody should undress, and to sleep on top of the coat. My mother stayed with three of us and my father went into the other room with my two little sisters. We heard sounds of laughter but we were very tired and slept. In the morning we went to a coffee shop and my father told us to eat as much as we could.

There were thousands of people on the streets and a very long line of cars, trucks and horse drawn carriages leaving town across the bridge. Rumors had it that the Germans were close by. And again we had no transportation. It was very hot and we started to walk again, dragging our heavy gas masks with us. My father still had not given us permission to throw them away for the Germans in the First World War had used poison gas. My father spotted a farmer with a horse drawn wagon full of hay, also fleeing. His children were sitting on the hay. You did not have to be Jewish to flee. There was a panic. I asked the farmer if we could sit on top of the hay wagon. I was my father's mouthpiece as he did not speak French. We climbed up on the narrow ladder and sat high up on the hay. The sun was shining on us and we were very hot. My father gave us some sugar with smelling salt so as not to faint. After an hour of riding, the farmer told us that his children were sick. We did not know if it was true, but we could not take the chance of staying with them. We got off and again no vehicle to ride in. We spotted a Jewish family with an old station wagon. They also had five children and were from Antwerp. We asked if we could join them. They took advantage of the situation and asked my father for quite a sum. He had to pay in advance. The car was very old and hardly moved. Uphill we had to go out and push. After half an hour of going nowhere, the car broke down altogether. My father and I and two of my sisters went to a car service to get some tools. We walked on a side road and the weather was glorious and we were very thirsty. From the houses along the road the local people were offering us apple cider. We had never tasted such a drink and we loved it. We drank and drank. By the time we came back we were all drunk including my father. The French cider contained a lot of alcohol. We were in a fantastic mood and we were singing and hopping along on the road. I can still see my mother's face, puzzled and angry. She asked my father if he had lost his

mind to sing at such times and circumstances. It did not take long for us to sober up. The car did not move and the man did not return our money. That family surely never made it to safety and must have died in the concentration camps.

That night we slept in a barn with twenty other people. We had to climb up a narrow ladder to get to the second floor on the hay. It must have been very difficult for my mother. My father spread out his winter coat which he had taken along and told us to sleep altogether between him and my mother. He was at all times aware that he had to safeguard us. Many times we had occasion to get transportation for some of us but he said, "all or nobody goes."

Before I continue with my story, I recall in our flight across France one day we came into a village and my little sister ran a high fever. There were no hotels and I rang the bell of a beautiful house and I asked if we could spend the night. The lady of the house welcomed us, sat us at a large table and gave us food. She told us that we could stay for the night. I and Shoshanna went upstairs to a beautiful large bedroom with a double bed. We had not slept in a bed for two weeks. In the morning the lady, herself, brought us breakfast in bed. We protested but she said we deserved it. The fresh coffee, milk, butter and jelly were a feast.

When we left Belgium the members of the Diamond Dealers Club decided we should meet in Royan, a small seaside resort in the center of France and await the end of the war there. How naive we were. Nobody expected the Germans to advance at such speed. We managed to get transportation and got to this place. We arrived at midnight. The streets were deserted. We decided to ask a policeman for advice. He told us that there were no hotels nearby but we could sleep in the prison, which we did. We were two in a cell on a plain straw mattress on the floor, no sheets. I was afraid to sleep but fell asleep anyway.

The next day we rented two rooms from a local family and listened to the radio. The Germans were advancing and were already in Paris. It was a good thing that we did not make it to Paris. We stayed a few days in that place. The reason I remember the place so well is that there were tiny bugs everywhere. They were called sand fleas. They were on us in the beds and seemed to bit only strangers. They came from the sand on the beach. My little sister was allergic to them and was covered from head to foot with hives which became infected. The doctor prescribed a white salve for it. She looked like a ghost covered with this think white salve. They also had bed bugs in the beds and we stayed up all night, sitting on a chair and laughing hysterically. My father stayed with my little sisters. He bound their hands together so they should not scratch. He sat on a chair and watched them. The landlady thought we were crazy and told us to leave. We had made a real mess with the powder. It was all over, on the floor and on the beds. We were young and could take it but it must have been very hard on my mother. Her legs were swollen and she must have been in shock, because she hardly talked. She might have been in a deep depression. My father, at all times, kept his cool, so we also never panicked.

My father did not speak French so I was his spokesperson. He consulted me on everything. We always had to plan the next move. The next morning the news was very bad. The Germans were advancing at full speed, the French army was being beaten and the English, who had come over to help, had evacuated their forces at Dunkirk. We had paid for the room in advance for the whole month. We took a bus to another city, wanting to take a train to go south, but the trains were not running. We took the local bus back to the house. Fortunately, the landlady let us in and we spent another such night. In the morning my father said, "Children, let's try again." Again we took the bus to the small city. As we entered a

cafe. We heard on the radio that nobody is allowed to leave their house and it is forbidden to be on the street. The Germans had arrived. We saw them coming down by parachute. My heart was beating and I was very scared. My father said, "Kinder, we have nothing to lose. Let's go on the highway." It was pouring. We had no umbrellas or raincoats and no luggage anymore. By that time we had already thrown away our gas masks. We walked on the road, seven forlorn figures, scared and wet. We did not talk to each other; we just walked.

All of a sudden a big noise, a full convoy of army trucks, hundreds of them, passed by. In front were the generals with flags, and then the red cross, and then trucks and trucks full of French soldiers. It was endless. It was the French army in retreat. The last truck stopped. A soldier opened the door and asked me, "Etes vous Juif," are you Jewish. I said, "yes." He said, "I may be court martialled for this but come into the truck. Don't speak and tell your parents not to speak a word." I asked him where we were going. He told me it may be Africa or southern France, whatever the high command will decide. We rode all night. It was very dark in the truck. He had shut all the lights and it was raining very hard. In the morning the sun was shining and we stopped in a charming French alpine village, so old that the goats were running around free. The soldier told us to go out quickly so nobody could see us. We never asked him his name or if he was Jewish. We had no chance. My father offered him money but he refused. He said just 100 francs to buy his men a chicken so that they would not talk. This unknown soldier kept us out of the concentration camps and it was surely like God had sent him to us.

Our ordeal was not over but we were temporarily safe. We rented a room in a small tavern and turned on the radio. The French had surrendered. France was divided into two parts, occupied and unoccupied France. The French formed a government friendly to the

Germans in Vichy headed by General Petain. We were in unoccupied France together with the general staff, its generals and who knows who. We entered the dining room of a tavern and sat down in a corner. On the other side of the room were all the generals. They looked at us, bedraggled and wet, and my mother speaking Yiddish telling us to eat. They said, "Regardez ces sales Juif," look at those dirty Jews. It is because of them that we lost the war." My sisters and I looked at each other and whispered, "If they only knew that they brought us here."

We took out our map and saw that the next big city was Pau. We found a man with a car who wanted to take us. Pau is a beautiful city in the Pyrenees surrounded by high mountains. We were again very hungry and went to the outdoor market. We bought beautiful fruit, cherries, peaches, apricots and we ate ourselves sick; all that fruit on an empty stomach. Night fell and we looked for shelter. We found a "centre d'accuelle." This means a place where they shelter people. It was in the gymnasium of a school. Mattresses were put on the floor. It was only for women and children. We were at least a hundred. The men were placed in a movie house. About midnight, my father stood near us and whispered to quickly get up and leave and follow him. He had found out from a guard that we were all going to be sent to a French camp. How he spotted us among all those sleeping bodies, I don't know. Again, it was raining. We found a soldier with a truck and asked for shelter. He let us in but said he wanted to sleep and we must be quiet. We were so wound up that we could not stop giggling. In the morning he drove us out of Pau and let us out in the countryside.

I remember it was again a beautiful morning and we walked on a country road. All of a sudden we noticed some monkeys in the trees and hundreds of Senegalese African soldiers

in bright red uniforms. They had been part of the French army and were camping here. They had monkeys as pets. Before we could adjust to what we saw, several French soldiers with rifles came toward us. They told my father that his wife and daughters were in great danger to be raped. He would give us an escort until we crossed the camp. Four soldiers with rifles walked on both sides of us. The Senegalese soldiers were very curious and lined up to look at us. We finally came to the end of the camp and thanked the French soldiers. My father at all times remained calm, never panicked or complained. This gave us confidence and we were very good. We trusted him.

We did not have to fear the Germans any more but we feared that the French would intern us in camps. Our fears were confirmed. All foreigners were sent to internment camps and the French police handed over the Jews to the Germans. They were shipped by train to Poland and to the concentration camps where they were gassed. We found out later that the Vichy government had made an agreement to hand over all Jews, including French Jews.

During our trek we met up with a family that we knew from Antwerp. We had been friends; father, mother and two handsome teenage boys and a beautiful daughter my age. We stayed together for a day but the friend was very annoyed with my mother for speaking Yiddish. We parted. That family was picked up by the French police and later turned over to the Germans. When the war was over we heard that they had all died in the concentration camps. We found transportation for the next big city which was Toulouse. A French family gave us rooms in their beautiful house but after several days told us they could not keep us, we were just too many. The next big city south was Marseille. But the trains were still not running. We decided to go to the bus station and lo and behold, there stood my uncle from Antwerp with his two daughters and son-in-law. My uncle was saying goodbye to his

daughter and son-in-law who were going to Marseille to get on a boat to Palestine. When my mother saw her brother, she started to cry and did not want to leave him. They told us they lived out of town in an abandoned house. My father reluctantly gave in. I was anxious to go to Marseille but could say nothing. Their house was in the middle of a prairie. It had no windows or doors and some straw mattresses on the bare stone floor. There was also no toilet. We saw an outhouse not too far, but the local people had the key and would not give it to us. I remember this because it was a real problem. We stayed there eight days. Huge rats appeared during the night. We were sleeping on straw on the floor. We thought they were cats. We had never seen a rat before and did not know what they looked like. There was also no electricity or gas. By the eighth day we heard the trains were running but you had to have permission from the police to board. We decided to risk it without permission. During the whole ride we worried that they would take us off the train. We finally arrived in Marseille. My uncle was reunited with his children. There were no boats leaving for Palestine, even if you had a visa.

Marseille was a city teeming with people like us trying to flee France. We met several Jewish families from Antwerp who like us had managed to reach Marseille. My father sold some of his diamonds to them so we would have money to live. We rented two rooms in a large hotel and finally had a real bathroom just for us with bath and shower. We did not feel so alone any more. We were not isolated. We saw familiar faces and my father met every day in a coffee house with the other refugees and plotted to try and find a way to leave France and go to South America or the United States. We registered with the American consul. It took all day, standing in the hot sun, in the garden because there were many people who did the same. There was a waiting list for five years. We were living in this

hotel and we were charged by the day and my mother complained it was too expensive and she could not cook there. My father sent me and my sister Shoshanna out to find an apartment. Unknown to us we lived on the edge of a red light district. Marseille was a major port city and the streets were full of sailors, soldiers, Moroccans and gypsies. It was impossible to get an apartment. They only had rooms to let. They saw two beautiful young girls and wanted to rent the rooms to us but not to the rest of the family. We rang many doors. It was a foolish thing my father did. We could easily have been harmed. My mother never got the message. We moved to a village half an hour by bus from Marseille together with our married cousins. My father and cousin went every day to Marseille. One day he told us that the Belgian consul was giving out visas for the Belgian Congo. We then could get a transit visa to Spain and Portugal. In Portugal we could try to get a visa to Cuba or the United States. It took us a few days waiting on long lines, but we got the visas.

But my mother was not ready to move on. She wanted to go back to Antwerp, her house, her bed, even with the Germans there. The Germans who occupied Belgium tried to lure the diamond dealers back. They said they would not harm them. Some went back and did not live to regret it. After a year their diamonds were taken from them and they were sent to the Warsaw ghetto. I now know this because I met Polish survivors from Warsaw later in New York and they told me how the Antwerp Jews, pampered and well-dressed, died like flies, unlike the Polish Jews who had already suffered for years.

One day my cousin came back from Marseille alone. He told us they had arrested all men who were not French citizens. He did not know what happened to my father. That day my father did not come home. In the morning my sister Shoshanna and I went to Marseille and searched for him. We went to several police stations and asked them where they kept the

men they had arrested. They denied having arrested anybody. In one station they laughed and told me he must have been with another woman. I replied that this was impossible: he had a wife and five children. That started a new round of laughter. My sister and I were in tears. We finally located him in a large marketplace together with hundreds of other men encircled by barbed wire and guards. He told me to go to my uncle and ask him to give me money to hire a lawyer. By the time I got back my father had somehow managed to free himself. He told me a story about faking to be a cripple; the cane he was carrying all during our trip got him out. The guard took pity on him and freed him.

Our minds were made up. We must immediately leave France. My mother was still reluctant but she was only one voice and we all wanted to leave. We started to get ready for our trip to Portugal. Our problem was what to do with the diamonds. My father was afraid they would take them away from him in Spain. We had to go to Spain to reach Portugal. We plotted together how to hide them. My father dealt with small diamonds. We hid many in the jars of cream from my little sister who still had some boils. My sister Regine sewed some in the hem of her skirt and I had the idea to remove the stays of my girdle and replace them with diamonds. We sewed for many hours. It took me a long time to push those diamonds in place. I then wore that girdle on the trip.

We boarded a train, destination Portugal, for transit through Spain. We settled down in the train. After half an hour the train stopped and police came to ask if we have something to declare and looked at our passports. My father's passport said diamond dealer. They told us to leave the train and asked us again if we had any diamonds. My father said no. I had rosy cheeks as a young girl and a stocky matron in uniform asked my mother why I was so red. She wanted to search me. My mother stepped forward and said, "search me,"

because she knew she had no diamonds on her. This was a mistake. The matron said no and asked me to follow her. She took me to a booth and asked me to undress. I took off my stockings, panties and dress and stood in my girdle. She watched me at all times. She put her hands along my girdle. The moment seemed to take forever. I stayed very calm and did not show any fear. I also did not speak. After what seemed to me a long while she said, "you can dress." She had not noticed the diamonds. In the meantime my family was in agony. We would have all landed in a Spanish jail. Nobody would have known where we were. Spain was a fascist country under General Franco. We boarded the train and told my father that we would never never do that again and I wanted to give him the diamonds back as soon as possible. I was very shaken up.

Our next step was Barcelona. We had a stay of six hours. We contacted the Jewish Committee. They gave us shelter and a meal. In the late afternoon we boarded the train to Madrid where we had to change trains. While going to the train in the station there was a man following us. He had heard my mother speak Yiddish and wanted to know from where she came. I was very annoyed and told my mother not to answer. After all we had to be careful. We still carried diamonds and who knows who he was. My mother ignored me and told him from Dobromil. It turned out that he knew my mother's family and lived in Madrid for many years. As we settled down, I mean sitting up on wooden benches, a young man came into our compartment and asked us if he could sit among us. He was Jewish and had no papers. We did not hesitate. We were riding all night and two Spanish soldiers with rifles were standing at the entrance and were looking at us. We talked to the young man and made believe he was our brother. We were very scared. In the morning two policemen came and asked for our papers. They took the young man away. We were very sad.

Portugal

The first thing we did was to rent a few rooms from an impoverished aristocratic Portuguese family. We bought some new clothing and scrubbed ourselves clean. We had both body and head lice when we arrived in Portugal. We all had a physical examination by a doctor in a clinic. We were all in good health but our poor mother had both high blood pressure and diabetes. She was a very brave woman to have endured such a strenuous ordeal.

As for me I was very excited to be in Lisbon. It was a beautiful city with wide avenues lined with cafes. The city was full of people from all over Europe, refugees like us, German spies, gypsies. I was struck by the Portuguese women. They carried their bundles on their head and worn only one shoe. The other they held in their hand. These were the poor women. The wealthy were very elegant. The city was also full of Portuguese beggars. I had never seen anything like it; I had never been out of Belgium. I was young and started to enjoy life again. My mother was again cooking and I with my sisters went every day to explore the city and its beautiful stores. The Portuguese people were very friendly. We made friends with two girls in our building. They spoke French and told us all about their cuiture. One had a boyfriend she could only see through her open window. They spoke for hours and he sang to her from the street below.

The high holidays came along and we went for services to a beautiful Portuguese synagogue. It was a moving experience praying in Lisbon, far from home, uncertain of the future among fellow Jews, most of them like us, refugees. I looked around me and was grateful that with God's help we had made it to freedom. In the meantime we had to worry where to go next. We had to go every two weeks to the police station to renew our visas. They asked us when are we going to leave for the Belgian Congo, but we had no intention of

going there. We wanted to go to the United States, but the American consul was very discouraging. America had a strict quota and only let in a few people and there was a long wait. We heard that in O'Porto, a city three hundred miles north, the American consul was very accommodating. We set out to go to O'Porto. We took a taxi because the day before there had been a terrible hurricane and the trains were not running. We had never witnessed a real big hurricane. Chimneys fell down, windows were knocked out; it got very dark in the middle of the day and my Portuguese friend scared me. She said she hoped we were not going to have an earthquake like the one they had sixty years ago when a large part of the city had crumpled. We arrived safely in O'Porto and registered with the American consul. There were already seven other families, diamond dealers, from Antwerp living there. We rented a nice apartment. I was very happy in Portugal. My younger sisters went to school, mother cooked and life was somewhat normal.

It was very hard to get the visa. We and the other families declared ourselves capitalists. Capitalists did not need an affidavit from somebody in America. It meant you had enough money not to be a burden. When it was our turn to keep an appointment with the consul, somebody from the other families came and brought us all their diamonds to show the consul that we were rich. When any of the other families had to go to the consul, they picked up our diamonds. We never found out if the consul knew that he always looked at the same diamonds. One day he called us in and told us that we were accepted, that we had to wait because there were other people who had registered before us. My father decided to take a big risk telling him that we had registered before in Marseille. He sent me to tell the consul. I took my sister Shoshanna with me. He must have figured two young girls had more of a chance to succeed than he had. We were received by the vice consul. We told

him that we were sorry that we did not tell the truth, that we were registered in Marseille. We had no country and if we went back the Germans would send us to the concentration camps. It was very important to get to the United States. To my surprise he was not angry. He picked up the phone himself and called Marseille. We got our visas. The other families did not wait and bought visas for Cuba.

We got tickets on an African freighter. The boat was 2,500 tons and carried cork. On May 10, 1941, exactly one year from the date we left Antwerp, we boarded the ship. We were saved. The small boat with its light cargo was like a toy in the rough Atlantic Ocean. We all got seasick except my father who took care of all of us. My mother and one sister never left their cabin. The rest of us were only sick one day and enjoyed the voyage. We were 180 people, all refugees from all over Europe.

On May 22, 1941 we landed in New York. That was fifty years ago. My mother died young at 64. She could never adjust to the new life. My father lived until he was 97 years old. We all took care of him. Until the very end he had a clear mind. After writing this story I feel very close to him and miss him. My sisters and I feel very fortunate and grateful to have each other.

Reg No Copyright
TX 4 8 1 5 0 4
Sept. 17, 1991